

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 17, 2019

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Gail Hall (Northfield Energy Committee), Deborah Zuaro (Northfield Conservation Commission), Jean Kerner (Northfield Community Development Network), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Bruce Wright, Scott Neun, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):

- a. Gail Hall: Informational Kiosk Update.** Ms. Hall has been meeting with local businesses, organizations, and Norwich University (NU) officials regarding this proposal since her last presentation to the Select Board members (11/26/19) seeking their support and/or donations. Since the plan is for NU students to plan the kiosk's design as part of a class project and classes resume in a few weeks (01/13/20), Ms. Hall would like the Select Board members to formally approve a kiosk site tonight so there'll be no project delays. The current timetable would have preliminary plans presented to the Select Board members at their second meeting in January 2020 (01/28/20). The site proposed tonight is near the intersection of Depot Square and Wall Street just south of the Community Bank. Manager Schulz said there had been questions regarding future maintenance expenses. If the structure is built with sturdy materials i.e. pressure-treated wood, etc.), this should not be a major concern for several years. Also, since the structure will be built on sidewalk, the Highway crew should be able to take care of minor repairs, etc. as part of their regular duties. Board member Goodrich asked if really was so important to decide on the final location before the NU students start working on its design, etc. Ms. Hall said the students must know this before working on the structure's foundation, as this must conform to its location. The kiosk's public accessibility also would be an important factor in the design plans.

Board member Goslant is concerned about the heavy vehicle traffic at this location and how that might affect pedestrian safety. There also is a concern with the proximity of the railroad tracks. Board member Goodrich suggested withholding site approval until an engineering study has been completed. Ms. Hall said timing is very important as the NU students will need to start working on the designs as soon as classes begin in order to complete the project by the end of the semester. She added most of the alternative sites around Depot Square seem to be "off-limits" due to nearby businesses, the potential loss of parking spaces, etc. If the proposed site is rejected, Ms. Hall said it might be necessary to move the kiosk across the railroad tracks towards the Police Station. Chair Maxwell said denying approval at this time would probably mean delaying the project for another year. On the other hand, he would hate to rush this project when a preferable option could be found later. The Select Board consensus seemed to be in opposition to the proposed site being too close to the intersection of Depot Square and Wall Street.

There appeared to be Select Board preference for one of the original sites suggested, which was still on the west side of the Common but a little closer to the Community Bank. Board member Doney felt the alternative site near the Police Station was viable as buses would be able to turn around at the Senior Center. Ms. Hall feared this site was so far removed from the Common that one of the project goals (visibility) would be lost. Chair Maxwell felt it might be putting the cart before the horse to have the Select Board members decide on the location without knowing how the structure will appear.

After further discussion, Ms. Hall suggested the Select Board members could provide conditional approval for a site that addresses the concerns expressed tonight. The NU students probably will provide three (3) separate proposals and there is no guarantee any of them will be acceptable to the Select Board members. In addition, Ms. Hall said she has been seeking donations for this project and she doubts anyone will contribute without knowing the targeted location. She added \$2,500 has been received in grant funds so far and she intends to apply for additional grant funds in 2020. Ms. Hall confirmed that no construction would take place until all the funding is in place. Chair Maxwell asked about the estimated cost. Ms. Hall said that depends on whether the kiosk would be powered by solar panels. With the solar panels, the cost would be about \$18,000. Without the panel, the probable cost is about \$12,000. This is in accord with the original estimate between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

After further discussion, the Select Board members agreed on conditional approval provided the location is moved further away from the Depot Square/Wall Street intersection. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to provide conditional site approval for an informational kiosk on the west side of Depot Square near the Community Bank building provided this site passes an engineering review for sightline visibility; all permits are obtained; and there is no objection from neighboring property owners including New England Central Railroad (NECR). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IV. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Northfield Conservation Committee (NCC).** NCC Chair Deborah Zuaro said the proposed budget includes an increase in the line item for "Tree Inoculation" from \$300 to \$400 in order to preserve local ash trees from the invasive insects known as the "Emerald Ash Borers," which has been sighted in neighboring towns. She added it is possible to work with another threatened Vermont community on a bulk purchase to lower costs. In addition, NCC member Ruth Ruttenberg has been working on a grant application that would provide Northfield with up to \$15,000 to deal with this problem. The grant would have a ten percent (10%) match amount so either NCC could do some fundraising efforts to cover this or the Highway Department could provide some "in kind" services. In addition, now that the Select Board members have approved the Town Forest Stewardship Plan, Ms. Zuaro said the NCC is asking for the establishment of a "Facility Supplies/Maintenance" line item in order to purchase and install new forest signage, etc. The initial amount budgeted for FY 2020/2021 is \$400. The Select Board members had no questions or comments regarding the proposed NCC budget. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Zuaro for the information provided this evening.
- b. Town Clerk/Treasurer.** Manager Schulz said the "Personnel Services" budget will see a 4.5% increase largely due to the recently approve union employee contract. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio said the "Contract Services" budget will increase from \$2,040 to \$5,550 in FY 2020/2021 due to a significant increase the New England Municipal Resource Center (NEMRC) is charging municipalities for its proprietary software. This is a hefty rise but there really is no other alternative available. Manager Schulz noted the "Administrative" budget will increase 2.3% due to slight increases in the line items for "Office Equipment/Maintenance" and "Dues, Mtgs, Subscriptions." There will be no change in the "Materials/Supply" budget, which will remain at \$800. In the Town Clerk Capital improvement Plan (CIP) budget, the "Vault" account has a \$20,768 balance with \$500 to be added in FY 2020/2021. Manager Schulz said this account was for future improvements to the vault adjacent to the Town Clerk's Office. Town Clerk Kim Pedley has indicated the amount of storage space, etc. is sufficient for the next few years but something will have to be done eventually. He noted any expansion of the room would be difficult due to the Municipal Building's footprint. Ms. Baroffio said the least expensive short-term solution would be to remove the working table in the center of the vault and replace it with vertical storage units. This might prolong the vault's serviceable usage for several years. Other long-term options would be much more expensive.
- c. Board of Civil Authority (BCA).** In FY 2020/2021, the BCA Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget will increase by 17.8% largely due to increased costs associated with the August 11, 2020 Primary Election and the November 3, 2020 General Election. This includes such additional expenses as programming the voting machine, higher postage costs for mailing early/absentee ballots, printing the ballots themselves, etc.
- d. Cemetery.** Manager Schulz noted Bruce Wright has a contract with the municipality, subject to annual renewal, to maintain the public cemeteries and to act as Sexton. Mr. Wright said the cemeteries are in overall good shape but some problems need to be addressed soon. This includes some tree removal at the Mount Hope Cemetery, which borders the NU campus. There are some trees in very poor condition that might damage monuments, etc. if allowed to come down on their own. Tree removal in this and other cemeteries costs about \$1,000 per tree and the proposed budget for this is \$5,000. Board member Goslant asked if there is no one in the community who might be willing to take the trees down in return for free firewood. Mr. Wright said, unfortunately, the worst trees are either near powerlines or too close to the road. Manager Schulz noted in the Cemetery CIP budget, there is a \$5,845 balance in the line item for Stone/Monument Restoration with another \$2,000 to be added in FY 2020/2021. There also is a \$21,579 balance in the General Cemetery Restoration CIP budget. Manager Schulz believes these funds should be sufficient for any upcoming projects. Mr. Wright said Mount Hope Cemetery is the largest and probably best of our local public cemeteries but it does have a problem with some stormwater runoff due to bad pipes, etc. Something will need to be done soon as the cemetery's gravel access roads are being washed out. Manager Schulz someone can be hired to address this using some of the CIP funds.

Mr. Wright added there were some complaints last year about the Mount Hope Cemetery grass. He noted the area had a bad grub infestation a couple years ago that led to bald spots and spreading crabgrass. Mr. Wright will try to fix this next spring by bringing in additional topsoil and grass seed. Board member Goodrich asked if there had been any theft problems in the cemeteries. Mr. Wright said he gets a couple calls each year about missing flowers, etc. Unfortunately, there is not much he can do to police the cemeteries. Board member Goslant said thieves have learned to take a few flowers from each cemetery in quick visits rather than strip one over a prolonged stop. He felt it is awful this has become a more common crime in recent years. Mr. Wright said he'd like to use some of the CIP funds to install some new signage in the cemeteries that would alert visitors as to what can and cannot be left near gravesites. He said plastic flowers are an especial concern as they can make it difficult to mow around the cemetery and can disable weed whackers, etc. Mr. Wright noted most cemetery visitors are very respectful of their surroundings. Chair Maxwell and several Board members then commended Mr. Wright for his good work in keeping the cemeteries presentable given the time and funds available each year for this purpose.

- e. **Town Garage.** Manager Schulz said the Town Garage O&M budget will see an overall 0.5% decrease due to past actuals. Chair Maxwell asked why the "Building Maint/Supplies" line item is set at \$6,000. Manager Schulz said this line item is a catchall for all expenses incurred in operating the Town Garage (other than utilities and heating fuel). In the Highway Department CIP budget (as discussed at an earlier meeting) there is \$69,774 balance for "Building Improvements" with \$2,500 to be added in FY 2020/2021. Chair Maxwell felt this was a healthy balance given all the work done at the Town Garage this past year. Board member Goslant said a very good job was done by all those involved.

- f. **Grounds, Parks, & Facilities.** Manager Schulz said the "Personnel Services" component of this budget will increase 5.8% in the next fiscal year. This is due to the aforementioned new union employee contract as the Maintenance Worker has half his salary come from this budget and the rest from the Highway Department. Board member Goslant asked if this budget included the expense of mowing non-park areas, i.e. around the Brown Public Library, Municipal Building, the Common, etc. Manager Schulz confirm this was the case. This expense used to be contracted out but now is being done in-house by the Maintenance Worker. The Grounds, Parks, & Facilities CIP budget will see an increase in the "Dugouts" account from \$3,000 to \$4,000. This was discussed at an earlier budget meeting (12/10/19) with Recreation Chair Sally Davidson present.

In the Grounds, Parks, & Facilities Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget, Manager Schulz noted no funds will be allocated for the replacement of the 2011 Half (½) Ton Chevrolet Truck now being used by the Maintenance Worker. The expectation is that when the Highway Foreman Trent Tucker's 2018 Three-Quarter (¾) Ton Truck is replaced in FY 2024/2025, the old vehicle will be turned over to the Maintenance Worker. There was some feeling among the Select Board members that the Maintenance Worker's duties did not really require a ¾ ton vehicle. They thought it preferable when the 2011 vehicle is no longer serviceable that a smaller, less expensive, and perhaps used vehicle be bought instead. An initial \$2,000 was put into the 2011 vehicle replacement account for FY 2020/2021. Board member Goslant would like more information regarding the current condition of the 2011 Chevy truck and its anticipated life expectancy.

- g. **Debt Retirement/Capital.** Ms. Baroffio noted this budget has changed since its initial drafting as there was a Select Board consensus to borrow in FY 2020/2021 for half the cost of a new Fire Department tanker truck, which is estimate at about \$340,000. She said the first payment on the ten-year note (if authorized by voters) would be in FY 2021/2022 and the interest-only amount would be about \$6,000. The annual payments for the rest of the bond period would be about \$24,000. Board member Goslant doesn't feel a four-wheel drive tanker truck really is needed as this adds about \$15,000 to the total vehicle cost. Board member Goodrich felt this was a safety issue as the Fire Department often responds to calls on backroads too steep for two-wheel drive vehicles. Manager Schulz added sometimes fires get out of control if you have to wait for Mutual Aid assistance. Board member Goslant feels with the ever increasing costs of emergency response equipment, regional departments will become the wave of the future since not every community will be able to afford all the latest equipment.

Ms. Baroffio said one outstanding issue that needs to be addressed is what to do when the lease/purchase agreement for the 2012 Loader and the 2012 Excavator expires in a couple years. She felt the Select Board members will need to decide whether to start putting funds into Highway Department CEP accounts for purchase or whether they would prefer to lease the equipment. Chair Maxwell believes the loader and excavator both have twenty (20) year life spans. Manager Schulz confirmed this and said Mr. Tucker believes both vehicles are in good shape. Chair Maxwell said no action is required at this time but the Select Board members should look to start setting aside funds for possible vehicle purchase. There is a \$4,249 current balance in the Excavator CEP account and \$7,045 in the Loader CEP account. Board member Goslant felt the Select Board members might also consider the purchase of a smaller vehicle that could be used to address stormwater problems on the backroads. The State of Vermont is very concerned about untreated stormwater getting into the Lake Champlain watershed and probably will be imposing new restrictions in the near future.

Manager Schulz said another upcoming debt issue is the borrowing for the completed Cox Brook Road paving project and the upcoming Union Brook Road reconstruction project. Ms. Baroffio said much will depend on how these debts will be financed, i.e. through local banks, the bond bank, etc. Chair Maxwell is confident Ms. Baroffio will provide the proper recommendation when the time comes. Board member Goslant asked if the municipality should start borrowing funds for the expected high expenses of fixing Northfield's most problem bridges, i.e. Stony Brook Road Bridge, Pleasant Street Bridge, Main Street Bridge, and (perhaps) Slaughterhouse Covered Bridge. Chair Maxwell believes the consensus at the last budget meeting (12/14/19) was there were sufficient funds in the Highway Department's "Bridges" CIP account (\$163,780) to cover at least the local match amounts for the VTrans structure grants needed to start funding these projects.

The next budget meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 7, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. Ms. Baroffio said every municipal budget now has been gone through except for the Municipal Pool. Chair Maxwell said this budget would be on the agenda along with a recap of the other budgets already discussed. There are unresolved issues in the Police, Fire, Ambulance, and Town Highway budgets that need to be revisited. Another unresolved matter is whether the municipality will fund the establishment of an Economic Development Director position as members of the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) have recommended. If the Select Board members decide not to fund this position in the proposed FY 2020/2021 budget, the NCDN members should be given the opportunity to put this matter on the 2020 Town Meeting Warning by petition.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).

- a. Scott Neun: Future Highway Projects.** Mr. Neun asked if the Select Board members anticipated any major road projects in the near future other than the Union Brook Road reconstruction. Board member Goslant is a member of the Highway Subcommittee and he doesn't foresee any unless additional grant funds become available. Manager Schulz said there is a plan to add new layers of gravel on certain backroads as well as some special work on Turkey Hill Road and Stony Brook Road. Mr. Neun felt major projects kept the Highway crew from dealing timely with relatively minor jobs, such as fixing potholes, which should be done as soon as possible. Manager Schulz said there have been several complaints about road problems in Northfield Falls but unfortunately most involve the State Highway (Vermont Route 12) and ultimately are the financial responsibility of VTrans. In addition, the drainage issues around the Northfield Falls Post Office are mostly due to a ditching problem on private property. The municipality can work with the landowner to help resolve the issue but cannot take direct action. Chair Maxwell noted Manager Schulz has worked with Mr. Tucker to create a seasonal timeline for routine highway maintenance work. This will help ensure major projects don't prevent regular highway jobs from being performed on schedule.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to adjourn.
Motion passed 5-0-0.

The Board adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 14, 2020